

phenomena as the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen effect, and these phenomena have been confirmed in the laboratory. In short, quantum mechanics is the most successful scientific theory ever to have been devised by the human mind. In choosing to side with Einstein against the founding fathers of quantum theory, I fear that Prof. Lawden may have backed the losing side!

As is well known, there have been numerous attempts to put some philosophical flesh on the bare bones of the quantum formalism. But most commentators would agree with Davies and Gribbin (1992) when they tell us that "quantum fluctuations are not the result of human limitations or hidden levels of mechanistic clockwork; they are *inherent* in the workings of nature on an atomic scale" (p.26; their italics). Whether we like it or not, it seems that God *does* play dice with the world. This inherent indeterminism seems to me to rule out any interpretation of relativity which involves a block universe. Whether or not Einstein's equations *necessarily* imply such an interpretation is a moot point, and one which I deliberately left on one side when writing my paper. It may be worth mentioning, however, that the formal equations of special relativity were derived independently by Lorentz and Fitzgerald, on totally different assumptions from those of Einstein, *before* he published his famous paper of 1905 (cf. Jeans, 1950, pp.292-3). Therefore there may be other ways of interpreting those equations which do not involve a block universe and a deterministic view of reality.

With all due deference to Prof. Lawden, I shall continue to believe in a future which is at least partially open, since this agrees with my innermost conviction that I have some freedom of choice, as well as with my knowledge of quantum mechanics.

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To the Editor,

In his efforts to show where and how I have erred in arguing for a clear paranormal explanation of (as examples) messages from Mrs Piper and the Cross-Correspondences, Dr Coleman (1998) is getting himself into ever deeper water; and once again the authorities he cites do not help him.

He first suggests that I have forgotten what both he and I have written, but he fails to provide examples of this, or show how it is relevant to the dispute. He then reiterates his inability to understand what I would think any reader would regard as clear and unambiguous, namely my statement that "the evidential value [of the Cross-Correspondences] cannot be assessed by any statistical method but only by common sense". From this he draws the conclusion that I lack the specialised knowledge to assess the evidence. But it must surely be quite plain to all except Coleman that only figurative

assessments of probability, not the objective measurements of mathematics, can be employed to evaluate the worth and impressiveness of apparently veridical messages from mediums.

But it is Coleman's attempt to differentiate between telepathy and mind-reading in the context of either Mrs Piper's messages or the Cross-Correspondences that is most misleading. There is no difference between the two. I am well familiar with so-called 'mind reading' or 'thought-reading' acts by stage magicians, and have been for over half a century. This appellation is used to describe what in reality is the product of a number of careful observations of physical or sensory signals, to augment any oral clues or secret glimpses of handbag contents, car-plate numbers and the rest. It is only the presence or appearance of mind-reading. Dr Coleman knows that perfectly well. He really should not rely on the reluctance of readers to look up the reference sources, to perceive a crude piece of verbal trickery. Even Podmore (1902) had the decency to refer to such professional 'thought readers' in quotation marks.

The clear implication is that Mrs Piper employed the sort of 'mind-reading' practised today by Kreskin. The suggestion is irreconcilable with overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Kreskin's methods have not the slightest relevance to the circumstances of Mrs Piper's performance. Several of his most spectacular feats depended upon palming slips of paper from members of the audience (Marks & Kamman, 1980). The act, often known as mentalism, is "a brand of conjuring that creates illusion of thought-transference" (p.44). It is unworthy of serious discussion to thus identify illusion with reality.

No less misleading is the quotation from Philpott (1915), who stated that "every bit of information given by Mrs Piper could be traced to actual knowledge of someone present at the 'sittings' or to suspicion based on this knowledge, or both jumbled together." Note, first, that this comment relates only to those sittings which dealt with the missing Connor, not to the general body of Mrs Piper's communications, as is suggested by the context of Coleman's letter. As such it is clearly implied that Mrs Piper was obtaining information from the minds of her sitters. Coleman says that this was done by methods employed by professional magicians (otherwise his entire argument makes no sense). I can see nothing which justifies such an interpretation, and a great deal which is inconsistent with it.

Coleman cites Frank Podmore's views of Mrs Piper's mediumship. The quotation he gives is not a conclusion from Mrs Piper's mediumship but is based on a series of sittings with Professor Hyslop. Podmore lists many incorrect communications as weighty evidence that Mrs Piper's trance personalities are phoney, but he avoids consideration of the conclusions to be drawn from correct statements. He made his views clear on p.340 of Vol. II:—

Taken as a whole the evidence produced on my own mind the almost complete conviction that Mrs Piper in trance is possessed of some faculty beyond the normal, a faculty at the lowest of tapping the thoughts of her interviewers.

Nothing here about stage mind-reading, which in this context would be fraudulent. Indeed Podmore (Podmore, 1901/2) specifically states that . . .

. . . deliberate fraud is seen to be preposterous as a final solution of what are conveniently called mental manifestations.

And in commenting on the monumental report by Hyslop (1901) Podmore

acknowledges his earlier conviction that . . .

... her utterances were amongst the strongest evidence which we possess for telepathy, or at least for some supernormal faculty of acquiring information outside the possible reaches of the senses.

And a few years earlier (Podmore, 1894) he writes:—

We are not yet . . . called upon to decide whether telepathy is a vestigial or rudimentary faculty.

Well, we are still grappling with this. It ill serves the cause of psychical research that we should have to waste so much energy and ink to establish what has been obvious for the last century and more to those willing to cast aside their prejudices in favour of an objective survey of the evidence.

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To the Editor,

The claimed superiority of the 'sceptical mind' never fails to amaze me. Time and again we are told that the gullibility of psychic researchers knows no bounds, and that our conclusions regarding the positive indicators we accept regarding the validity of psychic phenomena are the result of our ignorance of the specialized knowledge that lies in the domain of the critical sceptic.

M. H. Coleman's letter in the October 1998 issue of the *Journal* twice accuses Monty Keen of ignorance of the term 'mind reading', and then with assumed authority adds, "he should not be surprised when his pronouncements are received with scepticism by those who have extended their studies beyond the usual limits of psychical research".

I take no sides in the dispute as I am sure that Monty is quite capable of defending his own territory, but Dr Coleman should understand that Monty and many of his active colleagues in psychical research have studied, and managed to make a living from, such mundane subjects as physics, astronomy, electrical engineering, psychology, inventing, psychiatry, chemistry and journalism. They have also (surprise! surprise!) taken time out to study conjuring, fake mind reading, sleight-of-hand and other methods of duplicity and deception so dear to the hearts of our patronising critics.

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